

PC 16/5/3/1/1

P.O. Box 71,
Hilton, 3245.



Mr. Neil Alcock,
P.O. Box 37,
WEBBEN.

Dear Neil,

Thank you for your letter. I have taken so long to answer it because I have been trying to sort out my own thoughts as I have been going along.

The questions which the letter raises, rest assured, have been very much on my mind since my ban ended, and perhaps particularly during the past six months or year.

With regard, first, to the idea of trying to revive something like the Liberal Party, my reservations about this -- and I think I am being honest about it -- haven't really got anything to do with concern about being banned again. Of course I don't want to be banned again, but I don't think the possibility of that happening would put me off doing something which I thought would be effective in ensuring our ideas a reasonable chance of surviving here. You will notice that the emphasis is on the effective :

Before going any further, though, let me say that I do think a ban does have an effect on anyone who is not a fanatic, whether their fanaticism is religious, nationalist or communist. Those kinds of people are driven by a burning and unquestioning zeal which drives them on to the day of their death. Somebody like ourselves, lacking the same fervour, and whose ideas, or so we like to think, are based more-or-less on reason, begins to wonder what the hell to do. In my case this questioning is reinforced by what might be regarded as a rather sentimental attachment to my recollections of the Liberal Party. I do think it had something different from anything else and I find it difficult to get very enthusiastic about any of the other organisations I see about me which aim to do some of the things it tried to do. They all seem very much a second-best.

At this point you will say to me, well then, start the Liberal Party again. I don't think this is possible, or certainly not at present. This is partly because the law prevents it, but largely because the political scene has changed so much since the Party was closed down. In the public political arena you now have a PRP which thinks it might be getting somewhere, Inkatha, the Black Consciousness Movement, the Labour Party, the pro- and anti-S.A. Indian Council groups. In all

of them, probably, you would find people who were members of the Liberal Party or who might have been by now. I very much doubt, however, whether you would persuade many such people, at this stage, to leave whichever of those organisations they might belong to, to join another political party type of organisation. Most of them would, I think, argue that the political scene is sufficiently cluttered up with political organisations at present and that they feel they are more likely to achieve something through working through the existing organisations to which they already belong than through trying to start a new one. For these reasons I doubt if this is the right moment to try to start a new political organisation which would be competing for support in the public field, in spite of the fact that one has real reservations about all the others which are doing so.

Should one, then, be doing something else? Is there room for a pressure-group type of organisation of people of all races, the members of which would be committed, first and foremost, to the idea of a non-racial democratic society --- and who would be expected to hold this ideal always before the members of whatever other organisations they might belong to, and to try to influence them to accept it, even though the methods of trying to achieve it might vary from one organisation to another?

I discussed this idea briefly with Ernie and Jill at Christmas time and I want to talk to them again about it. I find the idea quite attractive, myself. Unfortunately the history of open pressure-groups isn't very good in South Africa. The Communist Party and the Nationalists, through the Broederbond, have operated very successful pressure-groups, but the influence of both of them was secret and not supposed to be known to the organisations they were trying to move in the direction they wanted them to go. On the other hand the Torch Commando, Anti-Republican League and the Covenant Movement were all supposed to cut across and not interfere with people's political affiliations, but none of them lasted long or achieved what they were supposed to achieve. Could a "Liberal" body pushing for non-racial democracy succeed where they failed? It might, because the three organisations I have quoted here all tried to avoid facing the race issue ~~xxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and started falling apart as soon as it confronted them (this may not be true of the Covenant, whose aims everyone has long since forgotten anyway). The issue with which we would be concerned, the future shape of our society, is fundamental, and will continue to be a topic for debate until real change comes, and even after that. But even if it seems that there might be a place for the kind of pressure group I have been talking about, in how much detail could one set out the things for which it is going to press? Take economic policy.

I was discussing a possible new LP with Jack and Beryl in Johannesburg late last year and this was the first thing we talked about. We all agreed that the capitalist system had been a ^{miserable} ~~total~~ failure in giving everyone in South Africa a reasonable slice of the cake, and that a policy much more radical than the old Liberal Party policy was now needed -- much higher taxes, redistribution of land, a programme designed to effect a massive transfer of wealth from rich to poor, which means, more or less, from white to black. How much potential "liberal" support in other organisations would a policy statement as radical as that frighten off? After all, both Inkatha and the PRF are committed to a free enterprise system.

So, even the pressure-group idea is one not to be lightly embarked upon. One has to be reasonably sure that it is going to work, for if a "Liberal" movement is launched now and fails to get anywhere, I very much doubt if there'll be another opportunity to ^{launch one} ~~do it~~. Timing is very important and we must consider very carefully whether the right time is now or whether it might not be when things have got a good deal worse. It is this which I referred to as the "mood" of the country when I talked about Edgar.

In the meantime one can go on trying to push one's ideas, restating them publicly when the chance presents itself, trying to do what one can through Race Relations, Council of Churches, or whatever organisations are around and reasonably sympathetic. Or AFRA, of which you say you would like me to be the Chairman! And talk even to the devil himself, P.W.!

The trouble with this role is that one is essentially a supplicant, because unless you speak from a position of power you really can't be anything else, and we have no power. I have always felt that one should try not to ask the Nats for anything, just keep telling them how bloody awful their policies are, and try to stop them carrying them out. I even have reservations about the line I suggested at that inaugural AFRA meeting, that one should ~~not~~ try to persuade Koornhoff not to move anyone until the consolidation proposals had been finalised. For even that implies that consolidation itself ~~is something~~ might have something to offer, whereas all it will do is make a policy that won't work look a bit more respectable. However, I can think of no other argument which might stop the removals for the present.

So there you have something about my reservations about AFRA and ~~my~~ thoughts about trying to revive a "Liberal" organisation of some sort. I think we must talk to more people about this last and get more of them thinking about it.

Love to Creina.